

many of us have been complaining about for years—cut it down to one page, allowed many needy people to skip over all those bureaucratic hurdles to be able to be eligible for Medicaid. It has been a lifesaver for a lot of our New York families.

We will not be able to continue that without some additional help. I think, actually, this program is a very good model we ought to look at in the future when we try to think of some permanent ways to provide more Medicaid assistance. But certainly this streamlined post-crisis process really did a tremendous job filling a breach that would have otherwise caused a tremendous amount of backlog and uninsured people not being given the health care they deserve to have.

Yesterday, Congressman PETER KING from New York, along with some House colleagues, introduced legislation on the House side to hold States harmless if they were slated for what is called an FMAP decrease—in other words, the match they get from the Federal Government—and provide an additional two point increase to all States, with an additional 2.5 percent available to States with unemployment rates higher than the average across States nationwide.

I think this is a good short-term solution. It is also a good stimulus, if you can get money into the hands of people who need to spend it, as people who have health care needs have to spend it. But it is the right thing to do as well.

I urge my colleagues to support the kind of cobbled together approach that would give COBRA premium subsidies, would provide an increase in the FMAP, at least temporarily, to help out our States that are facing such revenue shortfalls, provide a Medicaid option for non-COBRA-eligible workers which will be not only important for our States and for our economy and our health care system but absolutely essential to so many of the workers who, since September 11, have been not only out of work but out of health insurance as well.

I thank my colleague, the ranking member of the Agriculture Committee, for his indulgence, in being able to address this critical issue that will come before us sometime in the next few days. I appreciate greatly the attention that can be paid to making sure we provide the kind of health care support that is needed at this time.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at 12 noon, Thursday, December 6, the motion to proceed to S. 1731, the farm bill, be agreed to and the motion to reconsider be laid on the table; that the Senate then proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 254, H.R. 3338, the Department of Defense appropriations bill, provided, further that no amendments be in order to S. 1731 prior to Tuesday, December 11.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the two managers of the bill, Senators HARKIN and LUGAR, are two of the prizes we have in the Senate. The debate has been very civil, and they really look forward to going back to this bill. Debate on the bill should be one of the better debates we have had this year. I hope everyone who has concerns will get their amendments ready so we can finish this bill before the end of the year.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, if the Senator will yield, I thank the Senator for working out this agreement and for getting us to cloture on this bill so we can proceed to the farm bill.

As my good friend from Nevada knows, people in rural America need this bill. They need it now.

The Presiding Officer also knows that his farmers in Georgia, and especially farmers around the South, are going to have to go to their banks pretty soon after the first of the year to get loans ready for planting their crops. Their bank is going to say: What are you looking at? What are you going to have next year? They will not know. Many farmers will be right behind them in about February and March. They will be going to their banks.

That is why it is so important to get this farm bill finished. As I said earlier today, and I say to my good friend from Nevada, right now we are facing over 54 percent less net farm income today than we had in 1995. We can't afford to wait any longer. We have a good bill. It is a balanced bill. We have worked out all of our agreements.

This is a good bill for all Americans. It is a good bill for farmers all over this country. It is a good bill for people who live in our small towns and communities.

I want to personally thank my good friend from Nevada, the assistant majority leader, for all of his help in getting this bill to the floor and for making sure we get this bill finished before we go home for Christmas. We are going to do that. We are going to finish this bill. We are going to have it out of here, and we are going to let the farmers of America know what they can count on for next year.

I thank my friend.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the majority leader asked me to also announce that when we go to the Defense appropriations bill, we are going to complete

it this week. He will certainly have more to say about this tomorrow. But this is something we have to do. People who serve in the Senate want to be out of here by a week from Friday, and we have to finish this bill so it can be taken to conference over the weekend and the conference report brought back prior to next Friday. I hope everyone will understand that.

As he said—I am speaking for the majority leader—we may have to work through the weekend. But if people have any hope of getting out of here by next Friday, they are going to have to really work with us and move this legislation.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination: Calendar No. 532; that the nomination be confirmed, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, any statements thereon be printed in the RECORD, and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The nomination was considered and confirmed as follows:

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

John P. Walters, of Michigan, to be Director of National Drug Control Policy.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, all of us have a strong desire to confront and conquer the scourge of drug abuse and the ways it ravages American lives, especially young American lives. The debate on how best to prevail in this struggle is well under way in communities and at kitchen tables across the nation. The President's nomination of John Walters to head the Office of National Drug Control Policy has been the most recent catalyst for this debate.

I voted against Mr. Walters' nomination in committee. In light of that, I would like to share some of my concerns about Mr. Walters in the hope that he will take them to heart, and that he will greatly exceed my expectations and the expectations of the other Senators who voted against him in committee.

I believe Mr. Walters was the wrong choice for this job, and that his sharply partisan approach to drug policy issues provides an imperfect fit for an era of growing bipartisan consensus about drugs. Indeed, his ideological bent is a hindrance when our efforts to prevent drug abuse call for cooperation and pragmatism. Until his confirmation hearings, most of the little he had said and written about drug treatment was deeply skeptical. He has focused primarily on the need to reduce the supply of drugs, too rarely focusing on the neglected demand side of the drug equation. He has also dismissed concerns about the racial impact of our